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The Union as Employer: Personnel Practices in Canadian Labour Unions

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Résumé de l'article

Nous présentons ici les résultats d'un questionnaire envoyé à 297 syndicats nationaux et internationaux inventoriés dans le *Répertoire des organisations de travailleurs et travailleuses au Canada, 1992-1993*. Le taux de réponse fut de 20 %, 60 questionnaires complétés ayant été retournés.

L'instrument d'enquête a été adapté à partir du *Survey of Administrative Practices in American Unions de 1992* (Clark et Guay). La motivation initiale pour l'enquête américaine et pour l'étude des syndicats canadiens provient des changements récents dans l'administration des syndicats. La centralisation croissante des structures syndicales (Craft 1991) et l'accroissement des services aux membres (Clark et Gray 1991) ont contribué à l'accroissement du nombre de permanents syndicaux tant aux États-Unis qu'ailleurs dans le monde (Clark 1992). Cela suggère que la façon dont les syndicats utilisent et gèrent leurs ressources humaines est d'importance croissante pour l'administration des syndicats, comme ce l'est pour les entreprises, le gouvernement et les entreprises à but non lucratif.

L'enquête canadienne comportait un certain nombre de questions sur les pratiques de GRH. La partie principale de l'enquête contenait deux sections visant à savoir si les syndicats avaient des politiques formelles écrites sur neuf sujets différents pour leur personnel professionnel de leur siège social et pour leur personnel professionnel sur le terrain. Ces sujets incluaient : l'action positive, la discipline et le congédiement, l'embauche, l'évaluation du rendement, les promotions, les révisions salariales, la formation, le harcèlement sexuel, et les changements technologiques. L'enquête a également colligé des informations plus détaillées sur les procédures d'embauché, les pratiques de consultation, et si le syndicat avait un directeur du personnel ou des ressources humaines. D'autres questions visaient à connaître le nombre de membres, les tendances dans le membership et si le syndicat était canadien ou américain.

Pour l'ensemble de l'échantillon, les données démontrent que les politiques écrites de personnel sont l'exception chez les syndicats canadiens. De telles politiques, lorsqu'elles existent, visent plus les professionnels des sièges sociaux que ceux sur le terrain. Finalement, moins d'un syndicat canadien sur quatre (parmi les répondants) emploie un directeur des ressources humaines.

Cependant, une analyse plus poussée indique que les pratiques de personnel sont plus formelles et plus sophistiquées chez ces syndicats canadiens comptant plus de 50 000 membres. Trois quarts de ces syndicats avaient établi des politiques formelles pour les employés de leurs sièges sociaux et plus de la moitié d'entre eux avaient fait de même pour leur personnel de terrain. Soixante et onze pour cent de ces syndicats avaient un gestionnaire des ressources humaines et 86 % d'entre eux avaient signé une convention collective avec leur personnel professionnel.

Ces résultats confirment les conclusions d'une étude antérieure portant sur des syndicats américains (Clark et Gray 1991) à l'effet qu'il y a une relation entre le nombre de membres d'un syndicat (et alors présumément de ses ressources) et le degré de sophistication des pratiques administratives, au moins dans ce domaine. Cet effet d'économie d'échelle a des ramifications importantes pour le rendement efficace des syndicats et pour la structure future du mouvement syndical tant au Canada qu'aux États-Unis.

The Union as Employer

Personnel Practices in Canadian Labour Unions

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This paper reports on personnel practices in unions operating in Canada. The analysis is based on survey data collected from a representative sample of 60 labour organizations. The findings indicate that for the overall sample, formal, written personnel policies are the exception and not the rule in Canadian unions. The data also reveal, however, that personnel practices are conducted on a more formal, sophisticated basis for Canadian unions with over 50,000 members. The results confirm findings of an earlier study of U.S. unions that there is a relationship between size and sophistication of administrative practices in at least this one area. This "economy of scale" effect has important ramifications for the efficient operation of unions and for the future structure of the labour movement in North America.

Unions, like other organizations, operate in an environment of change. To be effective, and in some cases to even survive, labour organizations need to make wise strategic choices and then effectively implement the strategies chosen. And they must do this simultaneously in a number of different areas, including organizing, collective bargaining, contract administration, and political action.

Central to successful decision-making and policy implementation in all of the above endeavors are the employees of the union (Weil 1994: 163–164, 191–194). Unions are, in fact, highly labour-intensive enterprises. The services they provide are largely the products of elected or appointed union

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officials. For this reason, the effectiveness of the union as an organization is closely related to the effectiveness of the union's employees.

As unions expand the range of services they provide to their members, and as union government becomes increasingly centralized, the role of union employees becomes ever more important. This reliance is underscored by the increase in the number of appointed union staff, relative to the number of members, that most unions have experienced in recent years. While only anecdotal evidence exists to support this supposition in the Canadian context, a 1992 study by Clark provides empirical proof of this trend within United States-based unions (Clark 1992: 381-392).

Despite the growing importance of these employees to their employer-unions, previous research suggests that at least some unions have been slow to develop administrative practices and policies that define the organization's relationship to these critical resources (Belfer 1952: 442-446; Stamm 1969: 377-389; Clark, 1989: 586-587). This is ironic since the formalization and standardization of personnel policies has traditionally been one of the central goals of North American unions (Dunlop 1958; Ng and Maki 1994).¹ It is also problematic for these unions as it prevents them from benefiting from the advantages this type of employment relationship offers and leaves them vulnerable to charges of following double standards.

To date there has been virtually no systematic examination of the relationship between Canadian unions and their employees.² This study begins to fill that void by presenting and analyzing data gathered through an exploratory survey of labour organizations operating in Canada. This paper will discuss the personnel policies and practices of a representative sample of Canadian labour organizations. The differences across these unions will be examined, as will the factors that appear to influence the type of internal personnel program a union employs. These results will also be compared to those for unions operating in the United States. Finally, the paper will discuss the practical implications of the findings for the future of the Canadian labour movement.

1. The absence of such policies is sometimes justified by the assertion that unions are different from the other types of organizations whose employees they represent. They are, the argument goes, service organizations created and maintained to meet the needs of the union's members. Clearly, they are very much different than for-profit organizations. However, Canadian unions sometimes represent the employees of not-for-profit, service organizations, such as charitable groups and religious-affiliated employers. The difference between unions and these organizations, in terms of the employment relationship, is less apparent. Even if the notion that unions are unique among employing organizations is conceded, they still are employers, whose employees have the same needs and expectations as employees in other lines of work.
2. King (1988) is the only published study to date on this issue. The King study examined the use of grievance arbitration in staff union-union employer relationships in Ontario.

UNIONS AS EMPLOYERS

While the term employer-union might sound contradictory to some, it has great meaning to the nearly 19,000 people who are on the payrolls of Canadian labour organizations.³ Canadian unions employ individuals in many different capacities, from secretary to lawyer, statistician to custodian, computer operator to political lobbyist. While small national or provincial organizations might employ only a handful of people, the payrolls of the largest unions in Canada number in the hundreds.⁴

Although there are very few references in the literature to personnel practices within Canadian unions, the experience of U.S.-based unions in this regard is probably instructive.⁵ The evolution of personnel policies in U.S. unions, and by extension the Canadian affiliates of U.S.-based unions, has been slow and uneven (Belfer 1952: 442-446; Gordon 1986: 14-18; Clark and Gray 1992: 414-423). Canadian unions, like U.S. unions, are by definition political organizations. The political environment in which unions function influences all aspects of union administration, including the relationship between these organizations and their employees (Joseph 1959: 365; Stamm 1969: 379-380, 394-398).

Union leaders traditionally have risen to the top of their organizations based on some combination of political skills within the union and performance vis-à-vis employers. Rarely is administrative proficiency a major issue in national or provincial union elections. Once in office, elected union officials may find that the skills and experiences that helped them achieve their positions have not prepared them to deal with the administrative challenges they face.⁶ It is, therefore, not surprising that union leaders often turn to those skills with which they are most comfortable, political skills, in their management of the organization (Joseph 1959: 365; Dunlop 1990: 7).

3. Statistics Canada reports that in 1991 Canadian unions employed 18,830 employees. This total included clerical employees and paid elected officials, as well as professional staff. Of these employees, 10,875, or 57.8 percent, were male and 7,955, or 42.2 percent, were female (Statistics Canada 1993: 193).
4. As of 1993 the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) had 540 staff employees on its payroll. This included 58 at headquarters, 283 in the field, and 199 total support personnel.
5. As Kumar (1993: 7-8) points out, despite emerging differences, the experience of the Canadian labour movement is paralleled in many ways by that of the U.S. labour movement. At least part of this common experience is a function of the presence of U.S.-based unions in Canada.
6. The Canadian labour movement, through residential labour education programs sponsored by the Labour College of Canada and other labour education centres such as the Canadian Auto Workers facility at Port Elgin, Ontario, offer training courses to help union officials develop the skills necessary to administer a labour organization.

The result, in many cases, has been personnel policies and practices that are at great variance with the types of practices unions have historically pressed employers to implement. Detailed case studies of four U.S.-based unions in the 1960s found virtually no prescribed hiring or promotion policies, variable pay rates for employees with similar qualifications holding the same positions, arbitrary or inconsistent layoff policies, and few due process protections in the area of discipline and discharge (Stamm 1969). Practices of this sort were the main reason for the establishment of unions representing union employees in both the Canadian and U.S. labour movements over the last thirty years.⁷ The development of these staff unions placed union leaders in the even more unfamiliar position of sitting on the employer side of the bargaining table across from their own employees (Clark 1989: 588-595).

The presence of staff unions, or in some cases the threat of such organizations, appears to have contributed to the development of more formal, systematic personnel practices on the part of some unions. The move in this direction has also probably been influenced by the increase in the number of union employees, as well as by the increasing administrative sophistication of a new era of union leadership (Dunlop 1990: 6-7).

METHOD AND SAMPLE

In an effort to gather information about the current state of personnel policies and practices in Canadian unions, a questionnaire was constructed and mailed to the 297 national and international unions listed in the *Directory of Labour Organizations in Canada, 1992-93*.⁸ The questionnaires were addressed to the president of the organization if the union was based in Canada and to the senior Canadian official if the union was a Canadian affiliate of a U.S.-based union.

The Canadian survey instrument contained a number of questions addressing personnel practices. Central to the survey were two separate, but

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7. A 1989 study by Clark identified 40 bargaining units at the federation and national/international union levels of the United States labour movement (6 units at the AFL-CIO, and 34 units at 26 different unions). Similarly, staff unions have been a part of the Canadian labour movement for many years. CUPE, the largest union in Canada, for example, has 4 bargaining units representing every employee on the payroll except the elected officers and the human resource director. Fourteen of the staff unions in Canada have united to form the Confederation of Canadian Union Employees (CCUE).
 8. The survey instrument was adapted from the 1992 "Survey of Administrative Practices in American Unions" (Clark and Gray 1992). To the extent possible questions in the survey used in Canada and in the United States were kept similar in order to facilitate comparative analysis.

identical, sections that asked whether the union had formal written personnel policies in nine different areas for their headquarters professional staff and for their field professional staff.⁹ These nine areas were affirmative action, discipline and discharge, hiring, performance appraisal, promotion, salary review, training, sexual harassment, and technological change. The survey also asked whether the union employed a personnel or human resource director. Additional questions looked at membership levels, membership trends, and whether the union was Canadian or U.S.-based. Follow-up inquiries ascertained whether the professional employees of a respondent union were represented by a staff union.

Sixty surveys were completed and returned for a response rate of twenty percent. The unions responding represented some 1.2 million members, or approximately 30 percent of the 4.1 million union members present in Canada in 1992. The average membership of the respondents was 20,592 versus 13,768 for all 297 unions listed in the 1992 Directory. The size distribution of the respondent sample and of all Canadian unions are given in table 1. This distribution suggests that the respondents tended to represent unions that were, on average, a bit larger than those existing in the universe of Canadian unions. However, given the expectation that more union mergers will occur in Canada in the future, the data set may be representative of things to come (*Globe and Mail* 1992: A-12).

TABLE 1
Size Distribution of Respondent Sample and All Canadian Unions

	<i>Size Distribution of Respondents (n = 60) (%)</i>	<i>Size Distribution of All Canadian Unions (n = 297) (%)</i>
Less than 50,000	88	95
50,000 to 99,000	5	3
100,000 and over	7	2

9. Generally, headquarters professional employees refers to full-time, paid employees based at the unions's headquarters and performing service to the union's membership and officers in such areas as education, research, public relations, political and legislative affairs, law, and contract administration. Field professional employees would also be full-time, paid employees, but they usually work in field offices away from headquarters providing services directly to local bodies of the union in such matters as collective bargaining, contract administration, and organizing.

Eighty-two percent of the respondents were Canadian-based and 18 percent were affiliates of a U.S.-based union compared to the population of all Canadian unions in which 65 percent were Canadian-based and 31 percent were affiliated with a U.S.-based union. The difference between the sample and the population is in the same direction as the downward trend in membership in international unions that has occurred in Canada since the 1950s (Craig and Solomon 1993: 120–127). Thus, it again appears that the data set may be representative of things to come.

The data also reveal that 48 percent of the respondents had the majority of their members working in either the government sector or in the para-public sector. Although no directly comparable data are available for the Canadian labour movement, 1992 data show that 54.6 percent of all Canadian union members worked in the public or in the para-public sector (Rose 1995). This suggests that the sample generally reflects the high degree of organization in the Canadian public and para-public sectors.

Finally, it was determined that the professional employees of eight of the respondent unions were represented by staff unions.¹⁰

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

For the purposes of this analysis the data were grouped in several ways to detail differences in personnel policies for headquarters professional staff and for field professional staff. Table 2 contains general findings; Tables 3 and 4 review in more detail the personnel policies of unions with more than 50,000 members versus those with less than 50,000 members; Table 5 presents results using a number of different sub-groups and a mean composite score for formal personnel policies; and Table 6 contains a comparison of formal personnel policies in Canadian and U.S.-based unions.

General Findings

Table 2 lists the percentage of respondents having each of nine formal, written personnel policies for professional staff. The percentages are broken down for headquarters and field staff respectively. With the exception of sexual harassment policies for headquarters professional staff, the results

10. While the professional employees of only eight of the sixty respondent unions were covered by staff unions, anecdotal evidence suggests that a much higher percentage of clerical and support workers employed by unions have union representation. In most cases, these employees are organized by the Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU).

TABLE 2
**Percent of Respondents Having Written Personnel Policies and
 Rank Order of Policies**

(N = 60)

<i>Policy</i>	<i>Headquarters Professional Staff</i>		<i>Field Professional Staff</i>	
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Rank Order</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Rank Order</i>
Affirmative Action	32%	6	24	7
Discipline & Discharge	42%	2	34	2
Hiring	41%	3	31	4
Performance Appraisal	37%	4	28	6
Promotion	36%	5	28	6
Salary Review	41%	3	32	3
Training	36%	5	28	6
Sexual Harassment	58%	1	41	1
Technological Change	36%	5	29	5

show that less than 50% of the unions responding have formal written policies in the personnel areas specified.

A comparison of the results for headquarters and field staff suggests some interesting differences and similarities. On a policy-by-policy basis fewer respondents have established formal policies for field staff than for headquarters staff. However, ranking the frequency of policies for the two groups of staff employees leads to the finding that the policies most commonly found for headquarters staff are also those most commonly found for field staff. Thus the three most common written policies for headquarters staff — sexual harassment, discipline and discharge, and salary review — are also the three most common written policies for field staff. Interestingly, the frequency of affirmative action policies ranks last for both headquarters and field staff.

One explanation for the greater frequency of policies for headquarters staff may be that these individuals work in much closer proximity to elected officers than do field staff. This proximity may give these staff members an advantage in lobbying for formal personnel policies. One of the few in-depth studies of such employees in North American unions suggested that, because they are geographically dispersed and bound to a specific region, field staff often work in isolation from one another, as well as from union headquarters (Joseph 1959: 353–369). This situation would likely afford them less opportunity to press their case before the union's elected officials.

A second explanation for the disparity between the establishment of personnel policies for headquarters and field staff, may involve the degree to which staff are organized and, where organized, the degree of bargaining power they have. As a result of the working conditions described above, union headquarters staff may be organized to a greater degree than field staff. As a staff union would almost certainly attempt to formalize personnel policies, their greater presence at union headquarters could explain the disparity in formal policies. Also, there is reason to believe that even if field staff organize, the widely dispersed nature of their membership may make them a less effective bargaining unit than the more concentrated headquarters unit (King 1988: 12-15). The unionization issue is dealt with further in the discussion of Table 6 below.

Finally, it is interesting to note that the disparity in the frequency of written policies between headquarters and field staff is consistently between seven and ten percent, with the exception of sexual harassment for which the difference is seventeen percent. One explanation as to why this policy is much more prevalent for headquarters staff than for field staff is that the number of women employed at headquarters is greater than the number of women employed in the field (Stinson and Richmond 1993: 142). The women on union headquarters' staffs are likely to cause the sexual harassment issue to be a higher priority at their work locations.

Findings Concerning Size

Table 3 divides the respondents into those having 50,000 or more members and those having less than 50,000 members. The results clearly indicate that unions with 50,000 or more members are more likely to have formal personnel policies for both headquarters and field staff than are smaller unions.

Table 4 presents the rankings of frequencies for formal personnel policies for headquarters staff and for field staff for unions in the larger than 50,000 membership group and those in the less than 50,000 grouping. These results indicate that in unions with memberships larger than 50,000 the rankings for both the headquarters and field staff are identical, as they are for unions with less than 50,000 members. However, when the rankings for both types of staff in larger unions are compared with those in smaller unions, a different pattern is evident. For example, in larger unions, technological change and affirmative action are ranked in the first grouping, indicating they are among the policies most commonly found in these unions. In smaller unions, however, these two policies are ranked sixth and seventh respectively, suggesting that, in these unions, they are the least common policies.

TABLE 3
Percent of Respondents Having Written Personnel Policies by Size

<i>Policy</i>	<i>Headquarters</i>		<i>Field</i>	
	<i>Larger than 50,000</i>	<i>Less than 50,000</i>	<i>Larger than 50,000</i>	<i>Less than 50,000</i>
	<i>n = 7</i>	<i>n = 53</i>	<i>n = 7</i>	<i>n = 53</i>
Affirmative Action	86%	25%	71%	18%
Discipline & Discharge	71%	38%	57%	31%
Hiring	86%	35%	71%	25%
Performance Appraisal	57%	35%	43%	25%
Promotion	71%	31%	57%	24%
Salary Review	43%	41%	29%	32%
Training	71%	31%	57%	24%
Sexual Harassment	86%	54%	71%	37%
Technological Change	86%	29%	71%	23%

TABLE 4
Rank Order of Percent of Respondents Having Written
Personnel Policies by Size

<i>Policy</i>	<i>Headquarters</i>		<i>Field</i>	
	<i>Larger than 50,000</i>	<i>Less than 50,000</i>	<i>Larger than 50,000</i>	<i>Less than 50,000</i>
Affirmative Action	1	7	1	7
Discipline & Discharge	2	3	2	3
Hiring	1	4	1	4
Performance Appraisal	3	4	3	4
Promotion	2	5	2	5
Salary Review	4	2	4	2
Training	2	5	2	5
Sexual Harassment	1	1	1	1
Technological Change	1	6	1	6

Findings by Composite Scores and Sub-Groups

Based on previous research (Clark 1992; Clark and Gray 1992) the sample was broken down into sub-groups and the results for each sub-group were crosstabulated against the existence of formal policies for headquarters staff and for field staff. The sub-groups analyzed were unions with 50,000 or more members versus unions with less than 50,000 members;

Canadian-based versus U.S.-based unions; unions that had experienced membership increases of 25% or greater during the past ten years versus unions that had experienced membership decreases of 25% or greater during the past ten years compared with unions whose membership had remained about the same; unions with human resource directors versus unions without human resource directors; unions whose professional employees are organized by a staff union and those whose employees are not; and unions operating primarily in the public sector (including government and parapublic sectors) versus unions operating primarily in the private sector.

In order to facilitate this analysis, each of the nine formal personnel policies examined was "dummy coded" as "1" if the policy existed and "0" if it did not. The scores were added and a composite mean with a range of 0 to 9 was computed for each union.

The results in Table 5 show statistically significant differences between large and small unions, growing and declining unions, unions with human resource directors and those without, and unions whose professional employees are represented by a staff union and those whose are not. The difference in the mean composite scores for Canadian-based versus U.S.-based unions and for public versus private sector unions were not statistically significant for either headquarters or field staff

TABLE 5
Written Personnel Policies by Mean Composite Score and by Sub-group
(N = 60)

<i>Sub-groups</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Headquarters</i>	<i>Field</i>
		<i>Professional Staff</i>	<i>Professional Staff</i>
All Unions	60	3.52	2.65
Unions with > 50,000 Members	7	6.57*	5.29*
Unions with < 50,000 Members	53	3.11	2.30
Canadian Based	49	3.60	2.67
U.S. Based	11	3.09	2.55
Significant Membership Increase	25	5.10*	4.35*
Significant Membership Decrease	15	2.27	1.73
Membership Stable	22	2.80	1.57
Has HR Director	13	6.08*	5.85*
No HR Director	47	2.81	1.77
Public Sector Union	29	4.29	3.04
Private Sector Union	31	2.84	2.31
With Staff Union	8	6.38*	5.87*
Without Staff Union	52	3.04	2.09

* Indicates a statistically significant difference between the means in this sub-group
A t-test significant at the .05 level of probability was used.

These results suggest that formal, written personnel policies are associated with union membership size, recent membership growth, the presence of a staff union, and the presence of a human resource director.

The findings raise a number of further questions. Do membership size and growth provide resources that enable a union to "professionalize" its personnel practices through the employment of a human resource director? Does access to greater resources act to encourage the unionization of union staff? Does greater membership size and growth and access to greater resources lead to larger numbers of professional staff that constitute a critical mass for staff organizing efforts? Making these questions difficult to answer is the fact that subsequent analysis of the respondent sample found membership size, membership growth, the presence of a staff union, and the employment of a human resource director to be highly interrelated.¹¹ Unfortunately, the data gathered in the course of this exploratory study is not suitable for the type of multivariate analysis required to answer these questions. The relationships identified, however, are a first step towards a better understanding of the personnel practices of labour organizations.

Comparison with U.S. Unions

In an effort to place the findings of this study into a comparative perspective, the survey's results were compared with the results of a similar study of the personnel practices of U.S. unions. As the U.S. study examined only seven of the nine personnel issues included in the Canadian study, the two issues not included in the U.S. study (sexual harassment and technological change) were dropped from this phase of the analysis. In addition, in an effort to avoid any interaction effect, the 11 Canadian affiliates of U.S.-based unions included in the Canadian survey were not included in this analysis. The actual comparison, therefore, included 49 Canadian and 48 U.S.-based unions.

As Table 6 indicates, for most of the personnel practices the results of the U.S. study did not differ greatly or consistently from the results of the Canadian study. For headquarters staff, formal personnel policies related to three of the issues were more prevalent in U.S. unions, and four were found more often in Canadian unions. For field staff, six of the seven

11. For example, the professional employees of six of the seven unions (86 percent) with 50,000 or more members had a professional staff union while in only two of the 53 unions (4 percent) with less than 50,000 members were professional employees so represented. Also, survey results indicate that 71 percent of respondents with 50,000 or more members employed a human resource director while only 15 percent of the unions with less than 50,000 members did so.

TABLE 6
Frequency of Respondents Having Written Personnel Policies

	<i>Headquarters Professional Staff</i>		<i>Field Professional Staff</i>	
	<i>Canada (n = 49)</i>	<i>U.S. (n = 48)</i>	<i>Canada (n = 49)</i>	<i>U.S. (n = 48)</i>
Affirmative Action	32%	44%	24%	42%
Discipline/Discharge	42%	52%	34%	44%
Hiring	41%	42%	31%	42%
Performance Appraisal	37%	33%	28%	27%
Promotion	36%	31%	28%	29%
Salary Review	41%	35%	32%	35%
Training	36%	27%	28%	29%

policies were found more often in U.S. unions, but in at least three of these instances the differences were very small.

The findings did, however, indicate a substantial and consistent difference in the incidence of affirmative action and discipline/discharge policies. Both headquarters and field staff were much more likely to be covered by formal, written policies in U.S. unions than in Canadian unions. The greater prevalence of affirmative action policies in U.S. unions may be related to the fact that, generally, Canada has lagged behind the U.S. in the establishment of such policies in collective agreements. Evidence of this trend is found in a study of the incidence of similar provisions in collective agreements in Ontario by Kumar and Aciri (1992, 643-644).

The lower incidence of discipline/discharge policies is a more difficult phenomenon to explain. One possibility is that the wrongful dismissal doctrine in Canada gives more protection to non-unionized employees than the employment-at-will doctrine in the U.S. Under Canadian legislation non-unionized Canadian employees can often force employers to show cause where they believe they have been wrongly terminated (Adams and Adell 1992: 100-101), whereas this is not so in the United States. Union staff in Canada may not see the establishment of a formal discipline/discharge policy as a priority given the existence of statutory protection.

CONCLUSIONS

Professional union staff will play a key role in determining and implementing the strategies the Canadian labour movement employs to meet the challenges it faces in the years ahead. The attitudes and behaviour these

individuals bring to the tasks at hand will undoubtedly be shaped, in part, by the relationship they have with their employer-union. This relationship, in turn, will be significantly influenced by the personnel policies and practices of the organization.

It is probably safe to assume that most elected union officials would agree that the establishment of formal, written personnel policies is a fundamental step toward bringing fairness and equal treatment to the workplace. It would also not be unexpected for union leaders to suggest to employers that the establishment of such policies can spin off numerous benefits for the employer organization, including increased productivity and decreased turnover. The results of this study, however, suggest that many Canadian unions do not extend this practice to their own employees, thus forgoing the benefits such initiatives can bring.

There are at least three possible reasons for this ironic situation. First, as noted earlier, unions are political organizations. The employees of a union represent one of the most important political resources potentially available to elected officials (Bloom and Northrup 1958: 89, Child, Loveridge, and Warner 1973: 77-80). Political loyalty is often a prerequisite for appointment to both field and headquarters positions (Joseph 1959: 365; Stamm 1969: 379-380, 394-398; Gordon 1986: 14-18). Job assignments, salary increases, and opportunities for promotions can be used by officers to reward loyalty or punish disloyalty. The establishment of formal personnel policies in these areas, particularly if they are included in a collective agreement, takes the employment relationship between a union staffer and the union outside of the political arena. This is something many elected union leaders resist (Stamm 1969: 394-398; Gordon 1986: 14-18).

Second, in addition to increasing political control, the absence of formal personnel policies tends to increase the operational control the organization has over its employees. Unions are often put in the position of having to react quickly to employer initiatives such as, for example, plant shutdowns, technological innovations and disciplinary actions. The lack of formal personnel policies affords the union maximum flexibility in changing work assignments and locations, adding to or reducing its workforce, or using outside contractors to provide the needed services to meet these challenges. This flexibility is sometimes cited as a reason for union leaders' opposition to the establishment of formal policies (Stamm 1969: 394; ICSU 1993: 2). This is ironic as such logic is often rejected when used in support of employer demands at the bargaining table.¹²

12. It is not uncommon for union staff to accuse their union-employers of using the same kinds of anti-union tactics those leaders condemn when used by employers in the course of a traditional organizing drive. A July 1993 article in the *Village Voice* (Tomasky, p.15)

A third explanation that may explain the absence of formal personnel policies and practices within labour organizations is the leadership's lack of administrative experience (Dunlop 1990: 2). Although most union leaders rise to their positions based, at least in part, on their expertise and experience in employee-employer relations, many officials may not be able to effectively make the 180 degree adjustment from employee representative to employer. One of the solutions to this problem to which unions are increasingly turning is the appointment of a human resource director to administer this function on behalf of the organization. As noted earlier, 22 percent of the unions included in this study now employ such a professional. Among unions with 50,000 or more members, the figure increases to 71 percent.¹³ The difference in this area between small and large unions suggests that a lack of resources may be a factor in unions establishing systematic personnel policies.

There are, therefore, very real obstacles to the formalization and standardization of personnel policies and practices. However, in confronting this issue union officials should consider the impact that the absence of such policies and practices have on employee morale, commitment, and satisfaction, and subsequently in more tangible areas like turnover and productivity. Union leaders also might want to consider that the failure to establish systematic personnel policies and practices leaves them vulnerable to charges of condoning a double standard, one for the union's employees and one for all others. Such a situation is ready fodder for employers eager to embarrass a union.

Our findings also suggests that, even if they desire to establish formal, written procedures, smaller unions may lack the resources to do so. In today's difficult organizing environment, this presents a real dilemma for union officials. One of the clearest findings of this exploratory study is the relationship between membership size and formal, written personnel policies. Unions with large and/or growing memberships, are far more likely to employ systematic personnel practices and policies. While the formation of larger unions through merger or amalgamation offer potential benefits in a number of areas (Templer and Solomon 1988: 390; Chaison 1986: 107-128),

describes the opposition of Dennis Rivera, the president of the U.S.-based hospital and health care workers union, Local 1199, to a staff organizing drive within the union. In the article, Lisa O'Leary, the labour attorney representing the staff union, was quoted as saying "Rivera used every trick in the employer's handbook," including surveillance, discriminatory enforcement of a no-solicitation rule, and statements that bargaining would start from scratch if the staff union won the election.

13. A 1992 survey of administrative practices in U.S. unions found that 44 percent of the unions responding employed a human resource director. The figure rose to 87.5 percent for unions with more than 500,000 members (Clark and Gray 1992: 417).

this research suggests that union leaders should be cognizant of the advantages such structural changes can have on the relationship of employer unions to their employees.

Finally, there is evidence that Canadian unions are becoming increasingly creative and innovative in dealing with issues such as membership recruitment to technological change (Kumar and Ryan 1988: 2-3). Unions are becoming more proactive and less reactive, and are employing strategic planning techniques to move the organization forward (Reshef and Stratton-Devine 1990: 77, 88-89). In all of their efforts to confront the challenges that face them, unions must not lose sight of the fact that the most thoughtful, creative, and forward-looking policies and plans will be implemented, if not shaped, by the organization's employees.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings generated by this exploratory study provide a baseline for future research on this issue. Further insights into how the relationship between union staff and union/employers influences the organizational effectiveness of unions can be gained by examining the specific experiences of particular unions and their staffs. Future work might also attempt to link the nature of the employer-employee relationship in unions to such factors as turnover, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment.

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RÉSUMÉ

Le syndicat comme employeur : les pratiques de GRH chez les syndicats canadiens

Nous présentons ici les résultats d'un questionnaire envoyé à 297 syndicats nationaux et internationaux inventoriés dans le *Répertoire des organisations de travailleurs et travailleuses au Canada, 1992-1993*. Le taux de réponse fut de 20 %, 60 questionnaires complétés ayant été retournés.

L'instrument d'enquête a été adapté à partir du *Survey of Administrative Practices in American Unions de 1992* (Clark et Guay). La motivation initiale pour l'enquête américaine et pour l'étude des syndicats canadiens provient des changements récents dans l'administration des syndicats. La centralisation croissante des structures syndicales (Craft 1991) et l'accroissement des services aux membres (Clark et Gray 1991) ont contribué à l'accroissement du nombre de permanents syndicaux tant aux États-Unis qu'ailleurs dans le monde (Clark 1992). Cela suggère que la façon dont les syndicats utilisent et gèrent leurs ressources humaines est d'importance croissante pour l'administration des syndicats, comme ce l'est pour les entreprises, le gouvernement et les entreprises à but non lucratif.

L'enquête canadienne comportait un certain nombre de questions sur les pratiques de GRH. La partie principale de l'enquête contenait deux sections visant à savoir si les syndicats avaient des politiques formelles écrites sur neuf sujets différents pour leur personnel professionnel de leur siège social et pour leur personnel professionnel sur le terrain. Ces sujets incluaient: l'action positive, la discipline et le congédiement, l'embauche, l'évaluation du rendement, les promotions, les révisions salariales, la formation, le harcèlement sexuel, et les changements technologiques. L'enquête

a également colligé des informations plus détaillées sur les procédures d'embauche, les pratiques de consultation, et si le syndicat avait un directeur du personnel ou des ressources humaines. D'autres questions visaient à connaître le nombre de membres, les tendances dans le membership et si le syndicat était canadien ou américain.

Pour l'ensemble de l'échantillon, les données démontrent que les politiques écrites de personnel sont l'exception chez les syndicats canadiens. De telles politiques, lorsqu'elles existent, visent plus les professionnels des sièges sociaux que ceux sur le terrain. Finalement, moins d'un syndicat canadien sur quatre (parmi les répondants) emploie un directeur des ressources humaines.

Cependant, une analyse plus poussée indique que les pratiques de personnel sont plus formelles et plus sophistiquées chez ces syndicats canadiens comptant plus de 50 000 membres. Trois quarts de ces syndicats avaient établi des politiques formelles pour les employés de leurs sièges sociaux et plus de la moitié d'entre eux avaient fait de même pour leur personnel de terrain. Soixante et onze pour cent de ces syndicats avaient un gestionnaire des ressources humaines et 86 % d'entre eux avaient signé une convention collective avec leur personnel professionnel.

Ces résultats confirment les conclusions d'une étude antérieure portant sur des syndicats américains (Clark et Gray 1991) à l'effet qu'il y a une relation entre le nombre de membres d'un syndicat (et alors présumément de ses ressources) et le degré de sophistication des pratiques administratives, au moins dans ce domaine. Cet effet d'économie d'échelle a des ramifications importantes pour le rendement efficace des syndicats et pour la structure future du mouvement syndical tant au Canada qu'aux États-Unis.